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Prerequisites for Democracy in Cuba:
Promoting Liberalization Via
Civil Society

by

Elizabeth A. Breland

June, 1993

Thesis Advisor:

Scott Tollefson

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**Prerequisites for Democracy in Cuba:
Promoting Liberalization via Civil Society**

by

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Lieutenant, United States Navy
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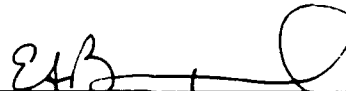
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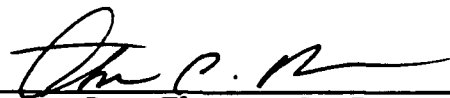
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines current U.S. policy vis-a-vis Cuba, and its impact on the development of democracy in Cuba. It argues that U.S. policy is counterproductive in promoting a sustainable inclusive democracy in Cuba, because it demands that the Castro regime hold "free and fair" elections prior to any normalization in the relations between the two countries. This demand ignores the fact that Cuban Civil society is woefully underdeveloped, and is not prepared to effectively participate in the creation and maintenance of a truly representational government. Without a vibrant civil society, Cuba is likely to fail under the control of an authoritarian, populist regime whose relationship to the United States may prove no more cordial than Castro's.

The thesis recommends practical steps through which the United States can reward Cuban liberalization without requiring immediate political democratization. The goal of these steps is to encourage the opening of political space within which Cuban associational groups with a clear stake in a freer society can flourish.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The policy of the United States vis-a-vis Cuba has, for the past thirty years, been focused primarily on bringing about the fall of Fidel Castro rather than on aiding in the development of a sustainable democracy. Far from threatening the Castro regime, the United States has provided Castro with a propaganda coup. The continued enmity of the world's last superpower has enflamed Cuban nationalism at a time when Cuban socialism has proven unworkable, prolonging the life of the regime in defense of the Nation.

U.S. policy demands that Cuba hold "free and fair" elections prior to any normalization in the relationship between the two countries. This demand for conformity to a procedural definition of democracy ignores the fact that Cuban civil society is woefully underdeveloped, and is not prepared to effectively participate in the creation and maintenance of a truly representational government. Without a vibrant civil society, Cuba is likely to fall under the control of an authoritarian, populist government whose relationship to the United States may prove no more cordial than Castro's.

Chapter II of the thesis reviews the literature on regime transition and democratization, and finds that a civil society capable of controlling its

own government can only be created gradually through a process of liberalization. Rather than designing a policy that rewards the incremental steps of liberalization, the United States insists that the Cuban regime leapfrog over the necessary process of consensus building, political development and the establishment of trust, and hold the elections that might well eliminate it. Though the ouster of Fidel Castro may be the final step in bringing democracy to Cuba, it should not be viewed as the ultimate goal.

Chapters III and IV examine the current state of Cuban civil society. Chapter III examines the success of mass organizations in promoting collective behavior, and its effect on the development of organized opposition movements.

Chapter IV examines the regime's repression of an effective opposition through a combination of "carrots and sticks" tactics.

Chapter V looks at attitudes within civil society that militate against the development of organized opposition, including a belief in the regime's moral and historical legitimacy, the linkage of Cuban nationalism with the socialist revolution, and the fear that the chaos in Eastern Europe will be recreated in Cuba.

Chapter VI examines Cuba's small, clandestine opposition movement, composed primarily of human rights groups which advocate greater

personal freedom rather than the overthrow of the Castro regime. The thesis argues that U.S. policy has hurt these nascent groups more than it has helped, providing the regime with justification for cracking down on activists in the name of national security. The migration and voluntary exile of intellectual and technical elite has also removed from the scene those people who might otherwise have provided the backbone of an opposition movement.

Chapter VII looks at the escalation of U.S. hostility towards Cuba through the implementation of the Cuban Democracy Act. This legislation attempts to tighten the embargo through an extra-territorial application of U.S. jurisdiction, regarded by many U.S. allies and trading partners as a violation of a general principle of international law and the sovereignty of independent nations. The chapter then offers the policy of "comprehensive engagement", now being applied in China, as a more forward-looking example of U.S. involvement in the rehabilitation of non-democratic regimes.

Chapter VIII forecasts the events that might occur if Fidel Castro falls before Cuban civil society has had the opportunity to develop sufficient political space. The most likely scenerio involves political instability and a violent struggle for power, an uncontrollable flood of refugees to the

United States, and pressure for U.S. intervention that will further exacerbate the chaotic situation.

The thesis concludes by arguing that U.S. policy should concentrate on promoting democracy from the bottom up rather than imposing it from the top down, aiding in the establishment of associational groups with a clear stake in a freer society. The thesis recommends that in order to assist in the growth of civil society, the United States should gradually end its embargo on Cuba and position itself economically and culturally for maximum influence on the development of a democratic, free-market ideology. To achieve this the United States should work with the Castro regime, providing rewards for liberalization without requiring immediate *political* democratization. Castro's strength thus far has been the ability to paint whatever picture of the United States he chooses. Exposure to American culture, products, business opportunities and citizens would expose Cubans to new ideas and expectations, and would provide the impetus for the development of a civil society too complex to be controlled by a totalitarian regime.

I. INTRODUCTION

For over thirty years the United States has subjected the state of Cuba to an economic and cultural embargo that has varied in intensity according to the level of hostility experienced between the United States and the Soviet Union, Cuba's patron state. With the fall of the Soviet Union, communism as a worldwide ideological force ceased to pose any significant threat to the national security of the United States. With the political conversion of its former patron and the subsequent loss of military and financial support, Cuba entered an economic freefall and suffered a significant diminution of its ability to cause the U.S. more than symbolic grief. Yet the United States has chosen to tighten its embargo of Cuba and press the international community to follow suit, even though the island can no longer be considered a Soviet staging area, Cuban troops are out of Africa, and the surrogate wars in Latin America are over.

In 1992, the United States Congress passed the Cuban Democracy Act, which prohibits foreign subsidiaries of U.S. companies from trading with Cuba, bans ships that have delivered or will deliver goods to Cuba

from using U.S. ports for six months, and authorizes the president to deny U.S. aid and special trade benefits to nations that give Cuba financial assistance or trade at subsidized rates.

Important U.S. allies regard the Act as an extra-territorial application of U.S. jurisdiction and a violation of a general principle of international law and the sovereignty of independent nations.¹ In response to the bill's passage, the members of the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to pass a resolution calling for an end to Washington's 30-year embargo. With the exception of Israel and Romania no country came to the United States' support, making it clear that the rationale of the Cold War had ended and that allies would no longer fall into line behind a policy that had no effect on their security but actively challenged sovereignty and profit. With the ebb of ideology as a driving force in the world, many

¹Given that foreign subsidiaries are governed by the laws of the host country, the Act raises the issues of extra territoriality and sovereignty; certainly, the United States would not stand for such a requirement imposed by another country. It would also seem to violate international laws protecting the free movement of international trade and shipping, violates a 1975 resolution of the Organization of American States which lifted collective sanctions against Cuba and permitted bilateral trade agreements, and runs counter to the principles of the international commerce established by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

nations made it clear that they would no longer sacrifice their domestic interests on behalf of a U. S.-generated "crusade".

This thesis will examine current U.S. policy vis-a-vis Cuba, and ask whether it supports the development of democracy or is simply focused on bringing about the fall of Fidel Castro. It argues that U.S. policy is counterproductive in promoting a sustainable, inclusive democracy.

U.S. policy currently demands that Cuba hold "free and fair" elections prior to any normalization in the relationship between the two countries, with the unspoken proviso that Fidel Castro not be in power after the votes are counted. This demand for conformity to a procedural definition of democracy ignores the fact that Cuban civil society is woefully underdeveloped, and is not prepared to effectively participate in the creation and maintenance of a truly representational government. Without a vibrant civil society, Cuba is likely to fall under the control of an authoritarian, populist regime whose relationship to the United States may prove no more cordial than Castro's.

This thesis will review the literature on the development of civil society, including the work of Samuel Huntington, Thomas Carothers; Alfred Stepan, Larry Diamond, Graham Allison, and Robert Dahl, all of whom

agree that a society capable of controlling its government can only be created gradually through a process of liberalization. It will then review the state of civil society within Cuba, and ask whether it is capable of promoting such a course of liberalization under the constraints placed upon it by the regime as a result of the perception of U.S. threat.

The thesis will look at the formation of U.S. policy towards Cuba, particularly the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992. It will ask whether the policy was developed to promote democracy or whether its intent was to appease the ultra-conservative Cuban American National Foundation and win votes and campaign contributions in support of domestic politics. Having found the latter to be true, the thesis will then offer suggestions for more positive U.S. involvement in the empowerment of Cuban civil society, thereby strengthening the liberalization process.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

For the United States to promote the development of democracy, policymakers must recognize that "development" is the operative word. Too often, the U.S. has replaced the prerequisites needed for a peaceful evolution with those likely to result in a chaotic, explosive "revolution" into an unknown future. In the case of Cuba, U.S. policy is directed toward the main goal of seeing Fidel Castro removed from power. Rather than designing a policy that rewards the incremental steps of liberalization, the United States insists that the Cuban regime leapfrog over the necessary process of consensus building, political development and the establishment of trust, and hold the elections that might well eliminate it. Though the ouster of Fidel Castro may be the final step in bringing democracy to Cuba, it should not be viewed as the ultimate goal.

A. THOMAS CAROTHERS

In his book, *In the Name of Democracy: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America in the Reagan Years*,² Thomas Carothers charges that U.S. policy is too simplistic, concentrating on the form of government more than on the substance of the governance. To the United States, he says, democracy is like an off-on switch in which the holding of elections and the coming to power of an elected government is the crucial transition from off to on. Historically, and as part of cultural mythology, U.S. democracy was born full grown from revolution; there was no slow process of transformation from a feudal or authoritarian past, and the Constitution and its institutional arrangement of government has existed without major change since its creation. With no sense of the requirements for long-term concessional evolution, policymakers are inclined to think that all a society needs to achieve democracy is the installation of the correct institutional framework.

In many ways, the United States promotes democracy much as it would negotiate a hostage situation. Rather than spreading the ideas, principles, and desire for democracy from the bottom up, it demands that

²*In the Name of Democracy: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America in the Reagan Years*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1991.

the "top" release its citizens at once or suffer the consequences. Dazed and suffering from a country-wide version of the Stockholm syndrome, the released populace often has no idea how to maintain its freedom, and resents the United States for having propelled them out of lives they understood into a system that does not automatically deliver security, wealth, or comfort.

Carothers criticizes the United States' definition of democracy as being too narrow, its focus on an electoral definition out of synch with the day-to-day reality experienced by citizens of non-democratic regimes. To them, the concept of "democracy" goes beyond political participation to include aspects of economic and social justice that the U.S. may be unwilling to support.

Before a society can produce a viable democratic foundation it must first address the social and economic conditions that militate against the responsible exercise of political freedom. Although the situation varies from country to country, these conditions often include the concentration of land and resources in the hands of a small elite and the monopolization of political power for the purpose of maintaining control of land and resources.

In the American perspective, democracy is a product of its economic system -a capitalistic, free-market, free-wheeling affair in which all have the guarantee of a chance but no guarantee of success. The expectation of the common citizen in a non-democratic society, however, is that the implementation of a democratic form of government will make them the equal of any Elite, not only in the voting booth but in the distribution of land and resources as well. Thus, the United States' emphasis on formalism to the neglect of substantive social issues lays the groundwork for the failure of democratic institutions when they prove unable to meet the expectations of the masses.

In a review of U.S. efforts to promote democracy in Latin America, Carothers draws six lessons for use by future policymakers:

1. The United States does not really have much influence over the political evolution of most Latin American countries. The political evolution of a country in any given period involves the most fundamental elements of the country's social, economic, political, and cultural character. The notion that an external actor can have a profound and lasting effect on that political evolution through some set of relatively short-term diplomatic, economic, or even military means ignores the complex reality of how societies are made up and how they change.
2. Leftist revolutionary movements are more a symptom than a cause of a lack of democracy. In reality, the main obstacles to democracy in Latin America have historically been a variety of structural domestic factors such as the extreme concentration of economic and

political power in the hands of undemocratic elites, the sociopolitical marginalization of whole classes of citizens, and the lack of any underlying national consensus on basic democratic values.

3. The conception of democracy Americans tend to apply abroad is not well-suited to generating effective policies for the promotion of democracy. U.S. policies concentrate on shaping the institutions of government in certain acceptable forms while underemphasizing the importance of bottom-up self-transformation as the basis for democratic development.
4. The nature of the U.S. foreign policymaking process is at odds with the nature of the task of promoting democracy in other countries. Policy initiatives should be both steadily funded and implemented over many years rather than called into question year after year, and they should be planned in advance rather than simply improvised in response to a sudden crisis or turn of events. Policy should be carried out in a low-profile manner, and there should be low expectations as to what effect an external actor can have in shaping the development of another country.
5. Simply agreeing on promoting democracy as the core element of U.S. policy towards Latin America does not necessarily mean that there will be agreement on policy directions.
6. In making democracy its primary policy focus in Latin America, the United States distorts its own view of the region. The complexities of social, economic, and political reality in Latin America may render formalistic democracy as insubstantial as a paper coat on a rainy day.

B. SAMUEL HUNTINGTON

In *Political Order in Changing Societies*,³ Samuel Huntington makes the case that elections are not the first answer to democracy but rather the concluding act in regime legitimation and the development of political organizations which expand to include all citizens. Far from serving as the initial indicator of democratic transition, elections are often disruptive and reactionary, hindering the development of an atmosphere of trust, legitimacy and conciliation. For a society that has not yet developed this necessary foundation, an election may sound the death-knell for future democracy. Thus, political organizations and a legitimate public order must be established before an election can take place with any chance of avoiding chaotic dissension.

In *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*,⁴ Huntington notes that "People Power," the mass mobilization of outraged citizens demanding a change in the regime, rarely plays a central role in regime transitions. An external force seeking to effect democratic change in another country cannot make it happen simply by goading the masses

³*Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 1968.

⁴*The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press. 1991.

into violent protest. In reviewing the transitions to democracy that have taken place in the latter half of the twentieth century, Huntington concludes that democracy can be made only through the *methods* of democracy. Negotiations, compromises, and agreements between political leaders in government and opposition are at the heart of democratization. A central compromise in the negotiation process is "the democratic bargain," the trade-off between participation and moderation. This reinforces the central premise of democracy-that the winner does *not* take all. Participation can be broadened and more groups allowed to compete for power if the current regime does not feel that in so doing it destroys its own agenda and its individual members.

Conditions to support democracy must be in place, but the emergence of social, economic, and external conditions favorable to democracy is never enough to produce democracy. Some political leaders who want it to happen and who are willing to take liberalizing steps must be in a position to initiate change. This means that moderate forces within the regime must be in a position to promote liberalization without risking the automatic accusation of "treating with the enemy".

C. LARRY DIAMOND

In *Beyond Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism: Strategies for Democratization*,⁵ Larry Diamond emphasizes the role of gradualism and sequencing in developing a stable, democratic system. Democracy is based on an institutionalized competition for power, and this competition can only become stable by developing a measure of mutual trust and confidence among the various contenders for power, a respect for the rules of the game.

The most successful path of democratic evolution involves initial development of political competition within a relatively small circle of opposing elites, gradually expanding to incorporate an increasing proportion of the population as legitimate participants. This gradualism gives contending actors time to learn to tolerate and work with one another and so to trust that defeat will not mean elimination.

There is also a need for the democratic opposition to play within the initially very restricted games allowed them by the regime. This gives the regime time to evolve into the new relationship, and allows it to more or less

⁵"Beyond Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism: Strategies for Democratization," *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 1989.

determine the timing, pace, and structure of its own exit - an insistence by democratic forces on immediate and humiliating abdication will likely abort prospective transition.

This gradualism benefits the opposition by allowing them time to gain experience with the risks and requirements of democratic elections and democratic governance before the entire state structure is opened to political competition. Democratic parties need time to develop their identities, leaderships, principles, and organizations, free from the pressures of an imminent election in which everything will be at stake.

The process of liberalization seems almost invariably to precede or lead democratization. Since it does not directly and immediately involve the transfer or surrender of power, the risks to established interests of liberalization are significantly less than of democratization. Liberalization is the process of making effective certain rights that protect both individuals and social groups from arbitrary or illegal acts committed by the state or third parties. On the level of individuals, these guarantees include the classical elements of the liberal tradition: habeas corpus; sanctity of private home and correspondence; the right to be defended in a fair trial according to preestablished laws; freedom of movement, speech, and petition; and so forth. On the level of groups, these rights cover such things as freedom from punishment for expressions of collective dissent from government policy, freedom from censorship of the means of communication, and freedom to associate voluntarily with other citizens... There does not appear to be any necessary or logical sequence to the emergence of these "spaces" for liberalized action... Nor are progressions in these domains irreversible. On the contrary, a characteristic of this early stage in the transition is its precarious dependence upon governmental power, which remains arbitrary and capricious. If, however, those liberalized

practices are not too immediately and obviously threatening to the regime, they tend to accumulate, become institutionalized, and thereby raise the effective and perceived costs of their eventual annulment.⁶

Liberalization provides the citizenry with the legal space and means to push the process of transition forward. The opening of certain avenues for autonomy of the society -like some forms of collective bargaining, lower level trade union elections, free elections in professional associations, political activity in the universities, protest by neighborhood associations, the support by the churches of certain forms of protest, a relatively autonomous cultural life, etc., create opportunities for opposition leaders and sometimes illegal parties to achieve a certain presence and basis of support.

Society-led regime transitions, brought about by diffuse protests by grass-roots organizations, massive but uncoordinated general strikes, and by general withdrawal of support of the government, might occur before

⁶From *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. Edited by Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1991

liberalization has created a foundation upon which a democratic government could be built.

D. ALFRED STEPAN

In *Paths toward Redemocratization: Theoretical and Comparative Considerations*,⁷ Alfred Stepan argues that the most likely outcome of crises of authoritarian regimes stemming from diffuse pressures and forces in society is either a newly constituted successor authoritarian government, or a caretaker military junta promising elections some time in the future. By themselves, therefore, society-led upheavals are virtually incapable of leading to redemocratization.

Such crises, however, can be avoided by recognizing that an authoritarian regime will resist political *democratization* on the grounds that it will likely result in regime elimination, but may allow a measure of

⁷"Paths toward Redemocratization: Theoretical and Comparative Considerations," in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, edited by G. O'Donnell and P. Schmitter. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 1986

liberalization in civil society since it does not obviously and immediately threaten regime existence.⁸

According to Stepan, it is the horizontal relations of civil society with itself, the interactions of diverse associational groups, which helps interweave the weft and warp of civil society and give it a more variegated and resistant fabric.⁹ These horizontal relations require regime toleration to develop, and must initially involve no more than non-threatening efforts to gain limited policy and social changes. The gradualness of civil society empowerment makes it difficult for the regime to recognize the point at which it is no longer able to withdraw societal gains without incurring the determined resistance of an organized and united civil society.

E. ROBERT A. DAHL

⁸STEPAN, Alfred. *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1988

⁹IBID. p. 7.

Robert A. Dahl's *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*¹⁰ discusses the mutual guarantees that make it possible for an authoritarian regime to tolerate, and thereby make possible, an opposition to its rule:

Opponents in a conflict cannot be expected to tolerate one another if one of them believes that toleration of another will lead to his own destruction or severe suffering. Toleration is more likely to be extended and to endure only among groups which are not expected to damage one another severely. Thus the costs of toleration can be lowered by effective mutual guarantees against destruction, extreme coercion, or severe damage. Hence, a strategy of liberalization requires a search for such guarantees.¹¹

Dahl stresses the search rather than the specifics, since in each country the problem is so different as to defy a general solution. In a fully hegemonic regime¹² an important step in this process may be the

¹⁰*Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 1971

¹¹DAHL, Robert. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. p. 217.

¹²In a hegemonic regime the population does not have the opportunity to formulate or signify preferences, or have their preferences weighted equally in the conduct of government. These opportunities can only accrue to a citizenry through the exercise of certain guarantees - freedom to form and join organizations, freedom of expression, the right to vote, eligibility to run for public office, right of political leaders to compete for support and votes, access to alternative sources of information, free and fair elections, and institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference. From Robert Dahl's *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, p. 3.

understanding that those in opposition to the regime will not be subjected to death or imprisonment, exile, or total destitution.

F. GRAHAM T. ALLISON

In *Can the United States Promote Democracy?*¹³ Graham T. Allison examines ways that the United States can promote democracy without falling into the trap of believing that elections are the only acceptable indicator of a move towards democratization. Allison points out that a sudden, conflictive break with a repressive regime is rarely the best beginning for a sustainable democracy. A more stable foundation is achieved through a process of liberalization prior to elections, allowing civil society to develop the skills needed to effectively control whatever government might come into power.

If one applies Allison's theory to Cuba, it implies that the United States must abandon the democratizing strategies developed in response to the Soviet threat, allowing the weight of the worldwide democratization trend to pull Cuba into compliance out of necessity rather than attempting to forcibly push it out of a decaying orbit and into a chaotic free-for-all.

¹³Can the United States Promote Democracy? *Political Science Quarterly*, Number 1, 1992.

III. CUBAN CIVIL SOCIETY

In order to suggest ways in which the United States might encourage associational groups with a clear stake in a freer society, we must first examine the condition of civil society in Cuba as it exists today.

It is difficult for an outsider to assess the possibilities for effecting change that may lie dormant in Cuban society. The totalitarian regime impinges on every facet of daily life, and there are few opportunities for the average citizen to participate in activities that are not planned, executed, and monitored by the regime.¹⁴

The most basic obstacle to the development of an opposition is the difficulty for those who silently oppose the regime to identify each other. This difficulty is compounded by the individual's need to simulate loyalty and adherence to the regime's policies as a survival mechanism. The regime fosters a climate of mistrust by erasing the distinction between delinquency and counterrevolutionary behavior. All activities not approved and

¹⁴Information on the mechanics of regime control and the structuring of collective behavior from *Cuban Communism*, edited by Irving Louis Horowitz. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers. 1989.

orchestrated by the state are viewed by the authorities with suspicion; the very term "authorities" reaches down into daily life to include the layers of neighborhood warders and informants who observe and report on the minutia of their subjects' lives. A departure from normal or routine behavior is reported to the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution having jurisdiction over that neighborhood, and appropriate action taken to punish behavior that does not conform to the 'goals of the revolution.'

A. ROLE OF MASS ORGANIZATIONS

1. The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution

The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) are all-pervasive. A mass organization with a membership of six million, about 80 percent of the adult population,¹⁵ the CDRs constitute an effective tool for the control and revolutionary socialization of the population. The CDRs act as the eyes and ears of the regime at the most personal level; they are designed as a "neighborhood watch" in which neighbors are both the watching and the watched.

¹⁵PLANAS, Richard J. "Why Does Castro Survive?" *World Affairs*, Winter 1992. p. 89.

Every city block has a CDR with an assigned president, secretary, and treasurer. The police can tap into this network for information on any individual: information on the suspect's friends, visitors, family background, work history and volunteer activities is readily available, as well as CDR officials' personal assessments of the revolutionary commitment of each individual within his jurisdiction. This type of surveillance can be done retrospectively, since the official identification card of every adult gives the person's residential history.

In addition, the CDRs represent regime bureaucracy at the local level. The worth of each individual is assessed within the context of regime loyalty and compliance, and resources are allocated and favors granted based on that assessment. A certificate from the CDR is required before any building material to repair or remodel a house can be requested from People's Power, the organization in charge of their distribution. In order to change residence, citizens must get permission from the CDR to transfer the family food identification card to a new address. The local CDR also controls access to many avenues of upward social mobility; letters of recommendation from zone committees vouching for an individual's correct revolutionary orientation are vital in gaining membership in the

Union of Communist Youth and in the selection process for professional university programs.

The power of the CDRs lies in their ability to manipulate the behavior of the individual; the "favor" of smoothing the transactions of daily life is provided in return for voluntary community service, conformity to regime standards of conduct, and participation in collective activities. Not only does the individual have little time to develop inappropriate interests, but the assumption of a conformist attitude as a survival mechanism makes it difficult for potential dissidents to recognize each other, or trust each other once contact has been established.

The pervasive nature of the CDRs makes it difficult to trust others; the constant fear of betrayal makes it seem an exercise in self-destruction for individuals to voice their opposition to the regime. For those dissidents who have found kindred spirits, there is a lack of opportunity to meet, plan, and organize without the knowledge of the CDRs. Even those who have assumed an overt posture of resistance to the government, such as the human rights and political dissident groups, operate under the assumption that their groups have been infiltrated by the

regime.¹⁶ With the regime so firmly in control of life's basic necessities, most choose not to assume the risk of opposition. Discontent, therefore, remains atomized and is manifested as personal unhappiness rather than as a focus for organized dissent.

2. The Central Organization of Cuban Trade Unions

Almost every Cuban in the labor force is a member of the CTC, and it is thus a mass organization that perpetuates collective behavior as a means of protective coloration. Workers have individual files or work records which contain information on their work history, level of technical training and proficiency, frequency of voluntary labor contributions, absences, and numbers of merits and demerits. This information, combined with that available from the neighborhood CDR, allows the authorities to trace the activities and assess the security risk of each individual.

B. CREATING CONFORMITY THROUGH THE LACK OF ANONYMITY

Even in instances when the individual is part of a vast crowd he is not anonymous; an uprising during a mass political rally, parade, or

¹⁶Planas, Richard. "Why Does Castro Survive?" *World Affairs*, Winter 1992. p. 93.

celebration is highly unlikely given their tightly choreographed nature. They exemplify the control the regime exerts over the population during gatherings which might otherwise have proved vehicles for the spontaneous coalescence of mass discontent.

Individuals participating in mass gatherings are there as members of neighborhood, school, or work-related groups which have preassigned physical locations in the gathering. Before each gathering, members of the CDR canvass the neighborhood under their control to ascertain which residents intend to participate in the upcoming event. Pressure to conform to regime expectations is intense, since failure to participate, to "support" the regime, will lead to a loss of moral capital in relations with the CDR and, therefore, in a loss of the advantages only compliance can earn.

A list of participants from each block is submitted to the zone CDR committee, which arranges transportation. Neighbors and co-workers travel as a group and are assigned a specific location at the site. In this tightly controlled situation it would be impossible for an individual to express anti-regime sentiments without being recognized by those with whom he lived and worked; every action and statement would be for attribution, and would have to be weighed in light of its future ramifications. To most such

exposure would prove an unacceptable risk, the cost too high to justify any attempt to turn a mass rally into a mass protest. With few other opportunities to gather on such a large scale, the chance of either deliberately or spontaneously inciting a mass uprising is remote.

IV. REPRESSION OF THE GROWTH OF AN EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION

Repression has many tactics, some as blatant as a beating, some as subtle as creating a preference for the devil that is known. The regime has been successful in repressing the growth of an opposition because it uses a combination of "carrots and sticks" to gain compliance. While the threat of physical violence is very real, and the passivity of mass-based culture exerts a tiring pull, it is the regime's manipulation of debate that has staved off active revolt.

A. REGIME CONTROL OF DEBATE

The regime does not attempt to convince the people that all is well, or that difficult circumstances can be fixed by an omnipotent leadership. Instead, the regime actively involves the populace in a search for solutions to the country's problems; thus included, many of the people who might be predisposed to oppose the regime are coopted by the hope that debate will lead to change, that their suggestions will be acted upon within the system.

This process of debate-as-sublimation was highlighted by Raul Castro's speech *Llamamiento* ("Call"), delivered in the spring of 1990 in

preparation for the 1991 fourth party congress. In this speech he criticized the party's "dogmatic" tendency to create "false unanimity" which "may lead to pretense, double moral standards, or the silencing of opinions." He called for "democratic discussions" and a nation-wide series of debates on Cuba's future, with an emphasis on economics.¹⁷ The debates, however, were to be "within" the revolution rather than "against" it; the topic of debate was how to perfect socialism not with what to replace it. Some of the suggestions presented during the debate were acted upon by the regime, though in such a way that they had little impact on the lives of most citizens. Yet, on paper at least, it appeared to be a sign that the state listened to the people and was implementing what was feasible.¹⁸

¹⁷GUNN, Gillian. "Cuba in Crisis", *Current History*, March 1991. p. 104.

¹⁸Suggestions included: that authorities be less preoccupied with maintaining social equality and reward the most productive workers with significant material benefits; that managers be given more autonomy in decision making and be less constrained by centralized planning; that the atrocious quality of services and small-scale manufacturing be improved by a process of selective privatization; that direct links between private farmers and consumers be established (this is already happening via the black market, which the regime tolerates whenever a safety valve is needed). IBID.

Complaining about the hardship of daily life appears to be a favorite pastime in Cuba; visitors to the island seem to be deliberately targeted by Cubans wishing to vent their frustrations about the scarcity of soap, pork, a nice pair of shoes, a favorite beer, the scarcity, in fact, of everything but personal freedom and representational democracy. The regime tolerates these complaints, perhaps because they believe that it channels discontent away from substantive issues.

B. CONTROL THROUGH RATIONING

One of the most effective methods of controlling the populace is the regime's penetration of every corner of daily life. There is very little personal space within which citizens can make choices independent of the state.

The regime effectively limits geographical mobility through a system of controls on the basic necessities of survival. Citizens are tied to their neighborhoods by a system of identification cards which designates the shopping center they are allowed to use and the day and time they are allowed to purchase certain items.¹⁹

¹⁹RUDOLPH, James D., ed. *Cuba: A Country Study*. Foreign Areas Studies, The American University. 1987. p. 105.

Rationing as an instrument of repression is successful on several levels: (1) the ID system allows the regime to restrict the movements of its citizens; they must be where they are suppose to be in order to buy their rations; (2) through the use of ID cards the regime is able to punish dissenters, denying them access to food, clothing, and materials with which they might otherwise be able to make a living; (3) by denying dissenters access to goods, the regime forces them to spend most of their time trying to secure provisions through other, illegal, means. Dissidents then have no time to organize; they are reduced to the time-consuming existence of a forager. By forcing the dissident to seek goods illegally, on the black market, the regime has also provided itself a crime with which to charge the dissident, should justification be needed; (4) the over-all effect of this dependence on the regime for basic necessities is the creation of obedient, compliant citizens who, whatever their personal feelings concerning the regime, are too consumed with the mechanics of daily survival, and too fearful of having those mechanics break down, to offer any resistance.

V. ATTITUDES WITHIN THE CIVILIAN POPULATION

Public transportation in Cuba has been decimated by the scarcity of oil and spare parts. Citizens queue for long hours at bus stops and off-ramps waiting for a ride that often never materializes. Bus routes are cancelled without notice and every lorry, private vehicle, and oxcart is packed. Poor logistics require that citizens expend many extra hours standing in line for rations, only to discover that their portion is inadequate or has somehow been lost in the distribution pipeline. Many workplaces send workers home early rather than have to provide them the traditional free lunch. After struggling into their workplaces, many discover that the production line has been shut down due to lack of inputs. These workers are often then "conscripted" into service in the agricultural sector, sent into the countryside to labor in the cane fields. Though they continue to receive their old pay there are no consumer goods to buy with their earnings. It is apparent to many Cubans that the socialist system has failed, and that the prospects for recovery under the current regime are dim. Why then is there

such apathy, such unwillingness to upset a status quo that is fair only in its equal division of privation?

A. REGIME LEGITIMACY

The regime's legitimacy is personified and anchored by one man - Fidel Castro - whose claims to moral authority and historical legitimacy are not without foundation. Prior to the revolution many of Castro's supporters were members of the social, economic, and political underclass, with little hope for their children's future; now their children are doctors, engineers, teachers, and party elites. Castro delivered many of the promises of the revolution - universal education, free health care, and a more equal distribution of resources. He is viewed as a father figure who, though inflexible and seemingly out of touch with reality, has the country's best interests at heart.²⁰

The regime's legitimacy is further enhanced by the peoples' fear of the unknown, or the perception that the alternatives to socialism will leave

²⁰Though this conclusion is based largely on anecdotal evidence, many Cubans, while excoriating the economy, the communist party, and socialism, seem unwilling to fault Castro with anything other than holding on to a fine ideal whose time had passed.

many completely disenfranchised. Many hope that there is a 'third way', socialism with an affluent face.

Enrique, a writer and translator, though critical of the regime's response to world changes, is certain that it is all that stands between the people and foreign domination. "Unlike Eastern Europe we are not debating a return to capitalism. I can't think of any way of living other than in socialism... One thing is clear to most all Cubans: socialism and national independence in Cuba are inseparable. The confusion is over how to make socialism work. Some think you do so by opening up and giving more power to the people. Others think you do that by yelling slogans at the people. But this much is for sure: when the Yankees machine-gun a Cuban boat, or when Bush puts a balloon in the sky to impose TV Marti on us, I, for one, don't feel the need any longer to debate with the dogmatists. My conflict with them evaporates... In this sense, the greatest support for our dogmatists comes from the United States."²¹

²¹COOPER, Marc. "Fidel -si?" *New Statesman Society*, 11 May 1990. p. 33.

B. NATIONALISM

Castro's power is linked to Cuban nationalism and the banner of anti-imperialism; he has stated that "the end of socialism, the end of the revolution, would be the end of the Cuban Nation."²² The United States has played a major role in firing this nationalism. The embargo provides Castro both a scapegoat and a focus for anger; though many Cubans recognize the effect of the break-up of the Soviet Union on the economy, the continuation of U.S. pressure in a "new world" where even China has Most Favored Nation status seems an indication of hostile intent and complete intractability. Statements from outside Cuba concerning Castro's fall and a U.S.-backed recovery do not convey a message of hope as intended, rather they are judged within the context of survival, safety, esteem, and liberation from oppression.

In particular, there is a vein of nationalism which is directed against the former Cuban elites who fled into exile during the early years of the revolution and who now make winner-take-all statements concerning their role in Cuba after Castro's fall. Though in the minority, these exiles are the

²²PURCELL, Susan Kaufman. "Cuba's Cloudy Future," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1990. p. 122.

wealthiest, the most politically influential, and the loudest. In May 1991 the Cuban American National Foundation, based in Miami and made up of the most right-wing elements of the exile community, established a committee to plan for the rebuilding of a post-Castro Cuba; members include former U.S. ambassador to the UN, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Senators Connie Mack and Bob Graham, Representatives Ileana Ros Lehtinen and Dante Fascell, Jeb Bush, and former President Ronald Reagan.²³

Jorge Mas Canosa, the Foundation's chairman, said that the committee was established to make business recommendations and simplify the chaotic transition from communism to capitalism, saying, "We must rebuild the country through the resources of the private sector. We must re-create in Cuba the miracle of Cuban exile private business success in Miami."²⁴ With little hard currency in Cuba it is obvious that the Committee's plans are aimed at an external private sector, not one they intend to develop within Cuba. The Foundation does not plan to allow anyone "friendly" with Castro to get a head start - Alberto Marino Sr., an

²³Marie-Claude Decamps, "Little Havana in Miami," in the *Manchester Guardian*, 15 September 1991.

²⁴Alfonso Chardy, "Planning a Post-Castro Bonanza," in the *Miami Herald*, 29 September 1991.

ally of Mas on the Foundation's board of directors, has said that any private investor "doing business in Cuba now will not be doing business after Castro. We're going to see to that."²⁵

This assessment of their own political clout may be overstated, yet the picture presented to Havana is one of a hostile force poised to seize territory through an invasion of superior finances. Many Cubans may well fear that they will cease to be a Nation and will find themselves once more subsumed and subservient to the United States if they do not support the Castro regime's anti-American stance.

C. THE EXAMPLE OF EASTERN EUROPE

Castro learned the lessons of regime breakdown from the transitions that took place in Eastern Europe, and he has taken steps to ensure that the cascade effects of liberalization do not begin in Cuba: 1) undertake as few political reforms as possible; 2) get rid of party deadwood and potential

²⁵Lee Hockstader, "Cuban Exiles Split on Life After Castro," in *The Washington Post*, 10 March 1992.

rivals early on, before forced to do so; 3) deal harshly with potential or evident disloyalty; and 4) don't allow formal opposition to organize.²⁶

The media has been flooded with all the "bad news" from the former Soviet Union - civil wars, unemployment, inflation, ethnic conflict, elimination of consumer subsidies and pension payments, and an increase in violent crime. In contrast to this devastation, the Castro regime offers a safety net to those who display the proper respect for the revolution and the system it created. Cuba's system shields its citizens from wide social gaps; though there is an elite in relative terms, the enormous gulf between rich and poor that is found in other Latin American countries does not exist in Cuba.

Though food is scarce, there is a perception that it is fairly divided among all. The regime has also virtually guaranteed a job to all who want to work, often for inflated wages.²⁷ Many of these positions are with the

²⁶DOMINGUEZ, Jorge I. "The Secrets of Castro's Staying Power," *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1993. p. 99.

²⁷This practice of full employment may actually hurt the economy: of 3.5 million active in the workforce, 1.1 million are classified by the national census office as holding "unproductive" jobs, including research of such topics as 15th-century French classical music or ancient Chinese poetry. From "Is Cuba Next?" by Mark Falcoff. Published in *Commentary*, November 1992.

state's bloated bureaucracy, creating another large group whose continued security depends on the status quo.

Cuba's Black population, comprising 40 percent of the total, fears the return of the mostly white, exile elite. Afro-Cubans have gained the most from the revolution in relative terms; they fear, and perhaps rightly, that Castro's fall would herald a return to deliberate social and economic stratification.

Castro asks them, "What lands are they going to seize? What are they going to do with the houses the revolution has given the people? Are they going to turn the child-care centers into brothels?"²⁸

Regime elites have also heard an important message-reformers usually don't last past the first elections. The difficulty of rebuilding a shattered economy, coupled with the concomitant "betrayal" of social advances, makes it almost impossible to be both an effective reformer and a successful politician.

Another important lesson conveyed to potential reformers by the Eastern European model was that U.S. financial aid could not be counted

²⁸Richard Boudreaux, "Can Castro Weather the Storm?" in the *Los Angeles Times*, 6 April 1992.

on as a given. The Cuban media portrays U.S. efforts to assist the former Soviet Union as anemic at best; once the perception of threat was gone, the U.S. seemed willing to allow Russia to sink or swim in the free-market ocean. Cuban reformers might therefore fear that the only U.S. "aid" they could count on in a post-Castro situation would come straight from Miami.

The Cuban American National Foundation claims to have buyers willing to pay \$15 billion for 60 percent of Cuba's land and assets.²⁹ When asked if he would run for office in Cuba after Castro's fall, CANF chairman Jorge Mas Canosa said he had not decided but, "There's no one in Cuba who can take over."³⁰ Given the influence of the Foundation in writing the legislation which tightened the embargo in 1992, and the perception that Washington's Cuba policy was designed to appease the powerful exile lobby in Miami, potential Cuban reformers may well consider exiles as presenting more of a threat to their security than the current regime.

²⁹Ernesto F. Betancourt, "Let Cuba Be Cuba," in the *New York Times*, 6 September 1991.

³⁰Marie-Claude Decamps, "Little Havana in Miami," in the *Manchester Guardian*, 15 September 1991.

VI. OPPOSITION AMONG THE CIVILIAN POPULATION

Prior to the revolution of 1959 Cuba did not have a tradition of strong civil society; thirty-three years of repression and cooptation have further atrophied the institutions that proved key to democratic transition in Eastern Europe: the Catholic Church, labor unions, private-sector organizations, international associational groups connected with science and the arts, and active dissident groups.

Dissident groups do exist in Cuba but their activity is clandestine and underground; often they are known only through references made by Castro concerning "cockroaches who try to create fifth columns at the service of imperialism."³¹ Even the most "counterrevolutionary" citizen has little idea what Cuba's only organized opposition - human rights activists - stands for. To many Cubans they are "just like the

³¹PURCELL, Susan Kauffman. "Cuba's Cloudy Future," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1990. p. 123.

counterrevolutionaries who planted bombs in cinemas just after the revolution. They have nothing to offer Cuba."³²

Unfamiliar to most Cubans, dissidents are often unrecognized by each other as well. The system fosters conformity, with each individual obliged to display loyalty to the regime in order to conduct the business of day-to-day life. Through the CDRs, the regime is able to monitor movement, habits, and participation in conventionalizing activities such as mass rallies, volunteer work, and political gatherings. From this information the regime then determines the appropriate way in which to deal with each individual: reward or punish.

Rewards may include a letter of recommendation for educational opportunities or employment, permission to move (by issuing an ID card which reflects a transfer to another ration distribution site), or allotment of scarce materials for home repair.

Punishment includes the withholding of these "favors", since the state holds a virtual monopoly on education, jobs, and resources, this expulsion

³²GUNN, Gillian. "Cuba's Search for Alternatives," *Current History*, February 1992. p. 63.

from the social net leaves "troublemakers" scrambling for survival, with little time or wherewithal to challenge the regime.

Those individuals who persist in defying the regime are subjected to "spontaneous acts of repudiation", harassment or physical assault by Rapid Reaction Brigades formed by the neighborhood CDRs and augmented by plainclothes security forces. Dozens of activists have been put on the "pajama plan" - denied work, harassed, and all but confined to their homes for days by the well-organized and indefatigable Brigades.³³ Though many dissidents have been badly beaten by regime-orchestrated mobs the objective of this strategy is to cow through the threat of violence, instilling the realization that worse could have happened and still might. Dissidents have been beaten, but not so savagely as to be characterized as torture. That might give potential activists the impression that the struggle had reached life-or-death proportions; moderated violence, on the other hand, provides just enough of an example to keep them safely on the fence.

In the end it is safer to keep opinions a private matter rather than risk ostracism and hardship for no apparent gain. One opponent of the regime,

³³Lee Hockstader, "Castro Turns His People's Love Into Fear," in the *Washington Post*, 13 September 1991.

vocal and articulate when speaking with a visitor, admitted that "nobody in the neighborhood knows my views - I keep them to myself."³⁴ Another says, "You never talk to a neighbor about politics unless it is someone you know very well, like a brother. That's a rule. You never know who is listening and whom they might tell."³⁵ Multiplied by ten million Cubans, this fear of exposure represents a grass-roots movement for change that will never develop.

Obscure in Cuba, the preferred stratagems of the human rights groups are often ignored by policymakers in the United States, who refuse to adopt the tactics of dialogue which might gain internal dissidents the political space needed to negotiate liberalization with the Castro regime.

A. DECLARATION OF GOODWILL

On January 19, 1992, the most prominent leaders of Cuba's human rights and dissident movement signed a "Declaration of Goodwill", which expressed the following:

³⁴GUNN, Gillian. "Cuba's Search for Alternatives," *Current History*, February 1992. p. 63.

³⁵Lee Hockstader, "Castro Turns His People's Love Into Fear," in the *Washington Post*, 13 September 1991.

1. "The organizations, groups, and movements in Cuba which watch over the respect for human rights and work for peaceful change reaffirm in this Declaration that they have not used and shall never use violent methods, and reject on principle, any form of violence."
2. The signers confirm their "willingness to hold talks as a means of solving Cuba's domestic problems and proclaim their aspiration to reconciliation among all Cubans."
3. The signers affirm that "isolation and deprivation shall not be instrumental in enabling the Cuban people to take, in freedom and peace, the steps they desire and need to overcome the crisis which they are enduring."
4. The signers ask the U.S. government to "reaffirm that it has no intention to intervene militarily in Cuba" and to express "its willingness to initiate talks with the Cuban government to resolve the differences between both countries on the basis of mutual respect for the determination of each nation."
5. They acknowledge the Latin American countries' "willingness to mediate for the purpose of achieving a fair solution to the differences between Cuba and the United States, and acknowledge the willingness of the countries of Latin America to cooperate as friends in order to enable Cubans to carry out freely any change that they may desire in their society."
6. They are grateful for the moral support of the "countries of Western Europe, Canada, and Spain in particular."
7. They ask that Russia and the other countries of the former Soviet Union promise "to make every possible effort to lessen the restrictions and shortages which Cuba is enduring. . . In the same manner and at the same time, these countries should endeavor to contribute with their goodwill efforts, while respecting the self-determination of the Cuban people, for the purpose of achieving

tolerance... reconciliation and dialogue within Cuba, which are the only means of solution desired by Cubans."³⁶

This document highlights the difficult position the regime's opposition finds itself in--rather than acting as a mediator between the regime and its moderating forces, the United States has forced the dissident movement to expend much of its energy countering charges that it is a tool of U.S. imperialism and aggression. Though the internal movement has played little role in shaping U.S. policy towards Cuba, Castro uses its activism as proof that there are destructive forces within the country that threaten the regime and, therefore, the nation. Defining the dissident movement as an extension of U.S. intervention allows Castro to justify his crackdown on activists, and taints the movement in the eyes of many Cubans. Rather than representing the desire for self-determination and peaceful change among Cubans, the movement is seen as representing the chaos and hardships of an externally-dictated "revolution."

³⁶Ramon Cernuda, "Dissidents on the Island See Threat to Democracy," in the *Miami Herald*, 2 March 1992.

B. MIGRATION

Another important avenue of activism has been lost due to the high incidence of defection from Cuba. During the first five years of the revolutionary government, an estimated 200,000 Cubans emigrated; many were the members of the intellectual and technical elite who might have provided an educated and motivated core of dissention.³⁷ This emigration then allowed Castro to place his supporters, most of whom owed their social, economic, and political rise to the revolution, into key positions in the government. This brain-drain continues today; the migration of young, highly-educated adults denies the opposition the very people who otherwise would have provided the backbone of an opposition movement.

Talented young Cubans, sent to Moscow during the 1980s to train as the regime's ideological and technical cadre, were instead exposed to glasnost, perestroika, and the rejection of communism by the Soviet Union. Rather than return to Cuba as the vanguard of a liberalization movement, however, over 500 sought political asylum in Russia; over 300 have since emigrated to the United States with the assistance of the Cuban American

³⁷HOROWITZ, Irving Louis, ed. *Cuban Communism*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers. 1989. p. 75.

National Foundation.³⁸ Although many of the students have banded together to form a dissident group called Union Cubana, their activities are limited to demonstrating at the Cuban Embassy in Moscow and helping others escape from Cuba. The first has no effect on internal dissent in Cuba because the incidents are simply not reported. The second depletes Cuba's already low supply of potential activists. In the words of one student who dreams of a free Cuba, "Castro is not immortal. My dream is to return to Cuba, a Cuba where no one dictates what I must say or do."³⁹ Whether frightened of the regime's intolerance or simply pessimistic about the chances of reforming the system from within, these students have forfeited the opportunity to play a constructive role in bringing that freedom to Cuba.

Those who might otherwise have provided the focus for an opposition movement have rendered themselves non-players by seeking political asylum. Doctors, artists, pilots, athletes, writers, engineers, scientists, musicians, students, and regime moderates: all were allowed some freedom

³⁸Elizabeth Shogren, "Cubans Raise Protest Voice - in Moscow," in the *Los Angeles Times*, 4 September 1992.

³⁹IBID.

of travel, were valued and respected by the regime and, presumably, were outside of Cuba might have enabled them to focus international considered trustworthy. Had they remained in Cuba and been voices for liberalization, they might have been able to effect positive changes in the system. Their contacts and renown attention on the agendas of internal opposition groups, and their high profiles would have made it difficult for the regime to harass them with impunity. After defection, however, they became non-persons in Cuba, their books and records were removed from circulation as was the influence they might have had on society and the regime.

C. COOPTATION

Musicians and artists who might otherwise have provided a focus for and popular interpretation of regime opposition have been coopted by a series of recent concessions. Where once the government had the right to keep all fees from performances, exhibitions, and sales overseas, the artist is now allowed to keep his earnings provided he does not break with the regime. Regulations requiring performers to permanently reside on the island have been relaxed, and some have taken vacation homes elsewhere.

Sponsored by the government at home and allowed to make a profit abroad, Cuba's artistic community is relatively well-off. In effect they, too, depend on the status quo for their position and for continued security.

VII. U.S. POLICY

A. THE CUBAN DEMOCRACY ACT

Until pressured by the election year need not to be "outdone" on any issue by Bill Clinton, President George Bush's policy on Cuba was largely predicated on the belief that Castro's fall was inevitable. With Soviet economic aid and military support gone, and the world in a free-fall towards democracy, it seemed unlikely that Cuba could survive for long in a world that had abandoned communism. There was little reason for the United States to play the role of "heavy" in bringing about a regime change in Cuba; the island could no longer be considered a Soviet staging area, Cuban troops were out of Africa, and the surrogate wars in Latin America were over. As one senior administration official said, "The ball is in Fidel's court. I don't think you will see a radical review of U.S. policy towards Cuba."⁴⁰

⁴⁰Norman Kempster, "U.S. Adopts Hands-Off Cuba Policy," in the *Los Angeles Times*, 14 September 1991.

In fact, the Bush administration was deliberately avoiding saber-rattling to keep Castro from turning the prospect of intervention to political advantage. "I don't think we want to come out too aggressively," a State Department official said, "There are some countries that feel sorry for Cuba, and we want to avoid other countries picking up the slack" left by the Soviets.⁴¹

President Bush rebuffed early efforts to tighten the embargo because he did not want to antagonize important allies who had business dealings with Cuba. However, in an effort to placate the Cuban-American constituency, he took a minor step towards concession by limiting the amount U.S.-based agencies acting as intermediaries with Havana could charge for travel papers and plane fare to the island. It was the first in a series of concessions that ended when Bush surrendered the formation of foreign policy to the final arbitration of electioneering.

The basic conflict rested in the divergent goals of the Bush administration and the proponents of the bill. The former sought the

⁴¹Christopher Marquis, "U.S. Avoids Tough Talk on Castro," in the *Miami Herald*, 22 September 1991.

establishment of a viable democracy in Cuba while the latter sought the downfall of Fidel Castro at any cost to the island's populace.

Edward Gonzalez, an analyst at the RAND Corporation who prepared a report commissioned by the Defense Department on policy options towards Cuba warned, "We should not become so fixated with Castro's downfall that we undermine the prospect for a free, democratic Cuba. If we ratchet up the pressure [on Castro] too much, the wrench will snap and we will have a crisis on our hands."⁴²

The Bush administration was becoming concerned at the heightened expectations among U.S. conservatives and Cuban exiles that the "liberation" of Cuba was imminent. The conservatives wanted to use the lever of promised U.S. humanitarian aid to the Soviet Union to accelerate the troop withdrawal from Cuba and to ensure the end to Soviet subsidies to the Cuban economy.⁴³ Given their willingness to jeopardize the democratization trend in eastern Europe, it must have been obvious to President Bush that there were elements within the government aligned

⁴²Quoted in IBID.

⁴³Martin Walker, "Pressures Mount in US to Hasten Cuba's Slide," in the *Manchester Guardian*, 22 September 1991.

with powerful special interest groups whose political loyalty could only be bought with a more pro-active role in Cuba's destabilization.

In mid-April of 1992 President Bush issued a pair of executive orders whose broad intent was to destabilize Cuba: the first barred ships that had previously stopped in Cuba from docking in U.S. ports, and the second allowed U.S. residents to send packages directly to Cuba, eliminating the need to send them via a third country.⁴⁴

The *real* intent of these orders, however, was to head off the need to endorse the more controversial, and damaging, provisions of the bill. Bush had received advance warning that Clinton would endorse the bill, and the executive orders essentially said, "I will not be upstaged by Bill Clinton."

The administration's Cuba experts spent days wrangling with congressional aides trying to reach a compromise on the bill before its first vote in the House. They opposed the provisions that sought to compel U.S. allies and U.S. subsidiaries abroad to embrace the U.S. embargo of Cuba.

⁴⁴Tom Fiedler, "How Candidates Were Squeezed on Cuba Policy," in the *Miami Herald*, 26 April 1992.

measures which administration officials knew to be both politically unwise and, possibly, illegal.⁴⁵

The State Department faced fierce objections from Canada, Great Britain and Spain, which hosted U.S. subsidiaries that did hundreds of millions of dollars of business with Cuba. Clearly, the United States' interests would not be served by an escalation of tensions based on Cold War rationale.

Once more, however, the bill's proponents were attempting to stampede Bush, choosing to see his domestic concessions as "something down on the Cuban Democracy Act," said Jose, capitulation rather than compromise. "Everyone's fired up about Bush's tone and his visible willingness to get Cardenas", spokesman for the Cuban American National Foundation, "There is obviously an intention to craft some definitive statement for U.S. policy."⁴⁶

In early May of 1992, Bush submitted to the logic of electioneering; in a policy flip-flop he dropped his opposition to the bill's controversial

⁴⁵Christopher Marquis, "Bush Lead on Cuba Policy 'Astute'," in the *Miami Herald*, 21 April 1992.

⁴⁶IBID

provisions, extending American jurisdiction beyond the boundaries of the United States to cover foreign subsidiaries of American companies.

In an election year, he was willing to forego the development of sound long-term policy goals in favor of the uncertain cultivation of short-term political gains.

B. COMPREHENSIVE ENGAGEMENT

A more forwarding-looking example of U.S. involvement in the "rehabilitation" of non-democratic regimes is its policy regarding communist China. In a letter to the House of Representatives disapproving additional conditions for renewal of China's Most Favored Nation status, President Bush justified a policy of "comprehensive engagement" as being more likely to encourage liberalization than a policy of confrontation.⁴⁷

Comprehensive engagement, which drives the wedge of influence with the hammer of interdependence, encourages positive change through contact with American democratic, economic, and educational institutions. The policy's most attractive feature is its non-impositional nature: it seeks to change through example rather than by fiat, and acknowledges that both

⁴⁷Letter quoted in *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, 5 October 1992. p. 759.

countries have something to gain from the relationship. For Cuba, the United States' demand for regime transition would no longer constitute a zero sum game, but an opportunity to move forward as a system-in-progress rather than as system forced to remain resolutely intractable for the sake of survival.

Though admitting that China had taken only limited steps on human rights issues, Bush stated that active dialogue gave the U.S. an avenue to express its views directly to China's leaders. The U.S. has no such opportunity for constructive dialogue with Cuba; total capitulation is demanded, accusations are made, and the United States presents itself as being completely unwilling to take a step forward until the Castro regime has been replaced. The U.S., then, has no influence over the Castro regime except in the negative - if an action, idea, or statement appears to have originated with the U.S. it is regarded by the Cuban government as being deliberately subversive. The Chinese government, by comparison, understands that listening isn't surrender and that the U.S. will not seize upon any effort towards compliance as a sign of exploitable weakness. Small steps forward are thus able to gain momentum because the regime does not fear that the next step will be its last.

In his letter to the House of Representatives, Bush expressed concern that withdrawal of the MFN status would endanger the market-oriented zones created by the regime and would undermine those Chinese who promote reform and rely on outside contact for support. Additionally, he acknowledged that it would endanger U.S. access to a growing market and cost thousands of American jobs.

On 27 May 1993, President Bill Clinton said that he would renew China's favorable trade status for one year to help its modernization efforts, but suggested that future renewal would be contingent upon China's progress in the area of human rights.⁴⁸ China's regime thus has more to gain than lose in reforming its policy concerning the treatment of its own citizens, and the United States has gained influence in guiding China's transition from communism to a market economy. Were this policy to be applied to Cuba it would undermine much of Castro's nationalistic appeal; the U.S. would be able to present itself as concerned but not overbearing, its attempts to influence reforms appropriate within the context of an ongoing, mutually advantageous relationship.

⁴⁸Letter quoted in *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, 5 October 1992, p. 759.

VIII. PROGNOSIS: U.S. PLANS GO AWRY

Capitulation by the Castro regime may not be played out in a manner that Washington considers advantageous. Castro might offer to convene a plebiscite on his rule or hold elections; with little in the way of organized opposition, limited access to mass media by nascent activists, continued repression by the security forces and the perceived need to present a united front to the 'enemy', this might provide Castro with the opportunity to play by "Washington's rules" at no real risk to his power. He might further ensure that such a gesture resulted in a favorable outcome by insisting "that the plebiscite or elections be held within a short time period, and that the United States first lift the embargo and grant trade credits in order to ease economic conditions prior to balloting. He could insist on limiting the number and efficacy of international observers on grounds that Cuba's sovereignty must not be violated, and he could limit the opposition's access to state-controlled media, while Party-directed mass organizations would be deployed to intimidate the populace and control balloting."⁴⁹ "This may

⁴⁹GONZALEZ, Edward. *Cuba Adrift in a Postcommunist World*. Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation. p. 52.

be a bad year for Castro to fall because there's nothing to take his place. You have weak opposition parties and a feeling among the communist leadership that they don't want another strongman."⁵⁰

The United States has focused its policy on bringing about the fall of Fidel Castro, largely ignoring the question of how that fall might occur and what its consequences might mean to future stability and democratization.

"The future in Cuba depends on how the transition is carried out. If there's a peaceful evolutionary change, your chances of creating pluralism and democracy and open markets are greatly enhanced."⁵¹

"Evolutionary change" is understood to mean a gradual unfolding or formation of events based on the progression of ideas, necessity, and circumstances towards a logical conclusion, which is itself not an ending but rather a point along a continuous, non-ending line. Current U.S. policy is based on the notion that "evolution" can be delayed until certain pre-conditions have been met, in this instance, until the U.S. is certain that

⁵⁰Edward Gonzalez. Quoted in "Castro's Exit Could Cause Morning-After Headaches," in the *Los Angeles Times*, 7 April 1992.

⁵¹Bernard W. Aronson, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. Quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*, 7 April 1992.

Fidel Castro will not play a role in negotiating Cuba's future. To minimize the chaos and violence of a change in Cuba's government, the United States must accept that, by its very definition, evolution is already in progress: though the U.S. is unlikely to play a major part in determining the course of transition, it may well find that its current policies and attitudes will make dealing with circumstances post-Castro even more difficult than the perceived vexations encountered during his rule. Those circumstances are likely to include: (a) political instability; (b) an influx of refugees; and, (c) the danger of U.S. intervention.

A. POLITICAL INSTABILITY

Fidel Castro's exit could set off a violent struggle for power. Though his brother Raul is next in the line of succession, his reign may be a brief one - though an influential player, Raul lacks the historic and charismatic legitimacy that Fidel enjoys among the majority of Cuba's people. There will be other individuals and factions within the military and party who will realize that Raul does not provide the absolutist glue needed to keep the Cuban people from turning against a regime that is no longer able to provide the social goods promised by the revolution yet maintains its fruitless rule through repression.

Coherent alternatives to Castro and socialism have not yet developed in Cuba. Regime opposition is represented by an embryonic and diffused human rights movement which has been poorly represented to the population, many of whom equate dissent with delinquency. Though lauded by the international community for their courage in the face of regime repression, activists are viewed primarily as hapless victims rather than successors to power.

Though the U.S. Interests Section in Havana maintains contact with dissident organizations it does not provide assistance to any group, as to do so would compromise their position as independent voices for change.⁵² This is a wise move in light of Castro's accusations that internal dissident movements are externally controlled yet, when combined with the social and cultural embargo imposed by Washington, it makes it difficult for the U.S. to identify and cultivate the important players or analyze their agendas and the parameters of their potential actions. The U.S. is thus unable to influence the course of events but can merely respond as they unfold.

⁵²Statement before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Washington, D.C., 8 April 1992, by Robert S. Gelbard, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs. Reprinted in U.S. *Department of State Dispatch*, 20 April 1992.

Recommendations published by the Inter-American Dialogue in "Cuba in the Americas: Reciprocal Challenges," may provide alternatives to the United States' out-dated and counterproductive Cuba policy:

The president and other senior U.S. officials should continue to make clear that the U.S. has no intention of invading Cuba, and vigorously condemn actions by exile groups.

The U.S. government should actively promote the free flow of information and ideas to the Cuban people by exempting from its embargo all transactions that foster communications between the Cuban people and people from the U.S. and other countries, including tourism. Beyond communications and travel, the U.S. government should only ease its embargo in response to positive steps taken by the Cuban government. Washington can best encourage such steps by working cooperatively with other governments of the hemisphere-and allowing them to take the lead in some areas.

In its policy, the U.S. should give greater weight to humanitarian concerns by making it easier for charitable groups to deliver food and medicine to the Cuban people and for Cuban-Americans to assist relatives and friends in Cuba.

U.S. broadcasting to Cuba must be responsible. Radio Marti should be a source of objective news, not propaganda. TV Marti, which violates international conventions, should be canceled.

The United States should not allow its Cuba policy to hamper relations with other governments. We oppose legislation to prohibit all trade with Cuba by subsidiaries of U.S. firms in other countries.⁵³

⁵³Excerpted from "Cuba in the Americas: Reciprocal Challenges," published by the Inter-American Dialogue, in Washington, October 1992.

B. REFUGEES

Whether Castro goes quietly or is forced from power there will almost certainly be a rapid, uncontrolled exodus of Cubans to the United States; the manner of his exit, however, will play a large role in determining the U.S.' response to the deluge.

Even if the change is peaceful the U.S., particularly the state of Florida, would see a flood of Cubans seeking work to raise money for starting businesses back home. The United States would have to decide whether to continue its policy of granting automatic political asylum to Cubans whose flight was now motivated more by economic than political considerations. Even if criteria were established to stem the flood, many hundreds of thousands would remain eligible for entry under Washington's family reunification program.⁵⁴

If change does not occur peacefully, the United States might find itself in the position of having to facilitate a mass escape from the island. The politically powerful exile community might demand that U.S. ships stand off Cuba to ensure the safety of those attempting to flee, with matters

⁵⁴Richard Boudreaux, "Castro's Exit Could Cause Morning-After Headaches," in *the Los Angeles Times*, 7 April 1992.

complicated by the sailing of a civilian "rescue fleet" from the U.S. seeking to pick up friends and relatives. If Cuba were in the throes of civil war these efforts would be construed as interventionist, raising questions as to the U.S.' role in the conflict.

C. THE DANGER OF U.S. INTERVENTION

If a democracy movement was perceived as battling against the repressive remnants of a totalitarian state, would the U.S. feel compelled to assist the forces for democracy? "If a civil war occurs, and Cubans are being slaughtered, there will be pressure from Cubans in Miami to send in the Marines," said a State Department official. "Will we? Who knows?"⁵⁵

President Bush said, "When Castro falls, we are prepared to help instantly in the rebuilding of a free and democratic Cuba."⁵⁶ This statement ignores the very real possibility that Castro's successor may prove no more amenable to U.S. direction, particularly if it inherited an economic disaster for which the United States was perceived as being partly to blame.

⁵⁵IBID.

⁵⁶IBID.

In recent years, Cuban relations with the rest of Latin America have steadily improved-military governments hostile to the Castro regime have collapsed, left-wing guerrilla movements that had been identified with Cuba are in decline, and Cuba displayed the proper solidarity with sovereignty concerns by supporting Argentina during the Falklands conflict.⁵⁷ Cuba has full diplomatic and trade relations with the majority of Latin America, which voted overwhelmingly to elect Cuba to the UN Security Council in 1989 and is moving to reintegrate Cuba into the OAS.⁵⁸

These efforts to bring Cuba back into the fold have been led by the Rio Group - Mexico, Colombia, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, and Peru - under the belief that they can influence Cuba's internal political system through diplomatic and economic interchange rather than through isolation and pressure. Spain, one of Cuba's most important foreign investors, also encourages internal reform through positive influence rather than isolation. Spain combines this with efforts to help Cuba's human rights community.

⁵⁷GUNN, Gillian, "Will Castro Fall?" *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1990. p. 137.

⁵⁸SMITH, Wayne S. "Washington and Havana: Time for Dialogue," *World Policy Journal*, Summer 1990. p. 561.

publicizing incidents of human rights abuses and facilitating delivery of supplies to the activists.⁵⁹

With socialism recognized as unproductive and Cuban-inspired revolutions no longer a threat, the emphasis in Latin America is increasingly on sovereignty, economic development, and independence; U.S. policy towards Cuba is viewed as counterproductive, and indicative of continued imperialistic and hegemonic assumptions that are losing relevance in the post-Cold War world. U.S. policy, particularly the Cuban Democracy Act, gives Latin America an interest in Cuba it might otherwise not have had; the region has now been handed a situation it can use to "level the playing field" with the United States, enhancing Latin American status as a moderator and asserting nationalism and independence from the U.S. by opposing it on the Cuban issue. David R. Mares' "Middle Powers under Regional Hegemony: To Challenge or Acquiesce in Hegemonic Enforcement,"⁶⁰ sums up the difficulties that arise when the United States

⁵⁹GUNN, Gillian. "Cuba's Search for Alternatives," *Current History*, February 1992. p. 63.

⁶⁰"Middle Powers under Regional Hegemony: To Challenge or Acquiesce in Hegemonic Enforcement," *International Studies Quarterly*, 1988.

attempts to coerce other states into participating in sanctions against a country that only the U.S. regards as a threat. The hypothesis states that the "behavior of the units (states) and the outcomes of their interaction will vary according to the structure of an international system and the positions the relevant units occupy within it."

With the end of the bipolar international system, communist-inspired insurgencies are no longer viewed by Latin American middle powers as the principal threat to their sovereignty; rather, in Mares' words, their "location in a regional hegemony constitutes the chief potential threat to their sovereignty." Since the United States' position as the only remaining superpower makes it the de facto hegemon of the world, it can be extrapolated that all other states will consider it in their best interests to thwart U.S. efforts at hegemonic enforcement. The UN's condemnation of the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 should, therefore, have come as no surprise.

Mexico, which voted against the United States in the United Nations resolution calling for an end to the U.S. embargo, has used the issue to challenge the U.S.' right to interfere in any country's political development. Mexico's government-run daily *El Nacional*, in commenting on Cuba's

national assembly elections, said the voting "represents an effort without precedent, since a nation threatened by an imperialist power that seeks to destroy its economic and social system cannot celebrate free elections, but must restrict democracy for national security reasons."⁶¹

The U.S. stands to lose influence in Latin America as these countries pull away from U.S. hegemony, developing alliances and policies which are not in the U.S.' interest. If the United States cannot show good cause within the context of a changed world order for its continued isolation of Cuba, it risks not only its prestige as a world leader but also the opportunity to avert chaos during the Cuban evolution towards democracy.

⁶¹Quoted in "Cuba's One-Party Election Getting Good Press in Mexico," in the *Miami Herald*, 25 February 1993.

IX. CONCLUSION

At this time, Cuban civil society is not strong enough to have a positive impact on the course of a regime transition. Due to the lack of associational groups, a coherent opposition movement, or any recognized political alternative to the Castro regime, an abrupt overthrow of the regime would result in political instability and social chaos. A sustainable democracy requires a period of evolution marked less by adherence to structural democracy, i.e. elections, than by a process of political opening and liberalization. This allows time for democratic parties to develop identities, leaderships, principles, and organizations, free from the pressures of an election in which everything will be at stake. This gradualism also gives the regime time to evolve into the new relationship, learning to tolerate expanding participation and trust that concession will not mean regime elimination.

Fidel Castro has been able to justify the repression of even the most moderate opposition voices by claiming that they are the puppets of a hostile superpower, bent on destroying the revolution that had brought

economic and social parity to the Cuban people. With the passage of the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992, Castro's assertion was further strengthened by the perception that the United States was actively escalating hostilities at a time when the Cuban "threat" had receded into irrelevance. Cuba's dramatic economic decline is a result of the failure of the communist model and the loss of Soviet trade; the U.S. embargo, however, provides Castro a scapegoat with which he can goad Cuban nationalism and justify continued sacrifice and repression in the name of anti-imperialism.

There can be no sustainable democracy in Cuba until there is a sustained *demand* for democracy from within Cuban society. That demand cannot be made until there is a blossoming of civil society, the growth of a diverse multitude of associational groups free of regime control and connected with each other and the larger world through a complex web of relationships.

U.S. policy should therefore concentrate on promoting democracy from the bottom up rather than imposing it from the top down, aiding in the establishment of associational groups with a clear stake in a freer society.

In order to assist in the growth of civil society, the United States must gradually end its embargo on Cuba and position itself economically and

culturally for maximum influence on the development of a democratic, free-market ideology. To achieve this the U.S. must work with the Castro regime, providing rewards for liberalization without requiring immediate *political* democratization. Castro's strength thus far has been the ability to paint whatever picture of the United States that he chooses; contact with American culture, products, business opportunities and citizens would expose Cubans to new ideas and expectations, and would provide the impetus for a critical examination of the regime's performance by a society grown too complex to be controlled by a totalitarian state.

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